



By Captain Mark C. Larsen VMFA-232

**A**s a Marine fighter pilot, I would never consider flying an FA-18 without strapping in first. The importance of strapping in before flight is well-accepted in the aviation community. Unfortunately, many drivers do not share this philosophy when operating a vehicle.

In my mind, crashing a car and an airplane have the same result: A body absorbs extreme forces that can cause injury and death. Why would you not want to

wear a seatbelt? Historically, these devices have saved countless lives. They have proven effective in millions of accidents, and, for my family, a seatbelt saved my father from certain death.

Just over three years ago my father was driving on a freeway in Los Angeles, Calif. He was in the far right lane, driving at a speed of 65 mph, which is the posted limit. What was supposed to be a routine drive home almost ended his life when his front right tire suddenly

blew out, causing him to sharply swerve to the right. My father tried to steer the car back to the left, but, by this time it had gone off the right shoulder and down a medium-grade embankment. As the car continued down the embankment, it rolled over, hit the retaining wall head-on, and came to a stop. The roof was crushed in, and the front end had crumpled.

After what could have been seconds or minutes, my father regained consciousness and found himself hanging upside down in his seatbelt, looking at a deflated airbag. He felt some pain in his legs, jaw and chest. A few bystanders gathered to help my dad and called 911. My father tried to free himself from the car but was pinned. One of the bystanders advised him to stay put and to relax because he might have hurt his neck or back.

Shortly, the paramedics and fire department

arrived. It took the rescuers about 20 minutes to get my father out of the car. His only injuries were bruising and soreness on his chest from the seatbelt and some minor trauma to his lower legs from hitting the steering console. While he was being taken to the hospital, the paramedics commented several times that the seatbelt had saved his life.

My father's accident illustrates the importance of wearing a seatbelt at all times while driving. You never know when fate will throw you a curve ball. As for me, I am grateful I only had to help my dad recover from his minor injuries--not attend his funeral. Around the holidays, I am always reminded of this fact. This past holiday season, I enjoyed watching my dad hand out the Christmas presents to the family and read bedtime stories to my two nephews...all because he chose to wear his seatbelt.



Sgt. Eddie Colon from MCB Quantico's driver training safety division looks on as PFC. Miguel Torreslopez prepares to meet the Convincer at a safety fair hosted by HMX-1 in Quantico, Va. The Convincer simulates a collision at five miles per hour.

Even at five miles per hour, notice the impact that PFC. Miguel Torreslopez suffers. That took the smile off his face!

